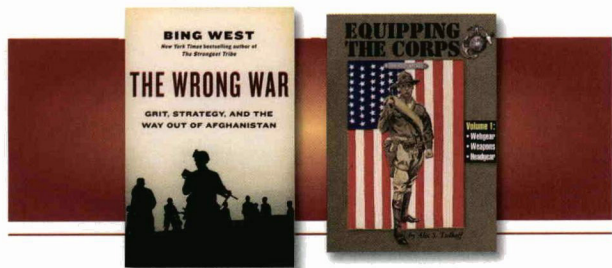


RECOMMENDED READING

# Books Reviewed

Unless otherwise noted, these books may be ordered from the MCA Bookstore. Subscribers may use members' prices. Include \$5.99 for shipping. Virginia residents add 5 percent sales tax; North Carolina residents add 6.75 percent. Prices may change. Make check or money order payable to: MCA, P.O. Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134, call toll-free: (888) 237-7683, or shop online at [www.marineshop.net](http://www.marineshop.net).



**THE WRONG WAR: Grit, Strategy, and the Way Out of Afghanistan.** By Bing West. Published by Random House. 336 pages. Stock #1400068738. \$25.20 MCA Members. \$28 Regular Price.

*"We have fought the wrong war with the wrong strategy. Our troops are not a Peace Corps; they are fighters. Let them fight, and let the Taliban fear."*

—Bing West

Corruption. Entitlement. Ambiguity. These are only a few of the obstacles the U.S. military faces in the ongoing war in Afghanistan. Through his experience patrolling alongside soldiers and Marines, Marine combat veteran and war correspondent Bing West highlights the pitfalls and dangers posed by the current strategy in Afghanistan through combat stories and case studies in "The Wrong War."

West's numerous tours as a correspondent in the Middle East during the last 10 years have led him to the conclusion that the U.S. military has misused American forces and adopted an insufficient strategy in Afghanistan. What West sees in American soldiers and Marines are enthusiastic volunteers, some new to combat, others hardened from previous tours, all eager to get into the fight. Yet, transitions between political administrations and contradictory statements from military and civilian leaders have rendered these warriors powerless to take their fight to the enemy.

Instead, West argues that the risk-averse

strategy of nation-building and modern counterinsurgency places these highly skilled fighters in vulnerable positions with nearly impossible rules of engagement. Within the U.S. military's higher ranks, West finds that detached leaders continually fail to effectively analyze and understand the vast amount of intelligence gathered on the battlefield of the digital age, often leading to misconceptions about the reality of the war from the grunt's perspective.

The author provides detailed accounts of missions in different regions of Afghanistan in order to display the extent to which the current Afghan strategy fails to achieve the high standards that define an American victory. In the eastern province of Konar (Kunar) on the border with Pakistan, West adeptly compares the plight of soldiers and Marines with that of King Sisyphus and his eternal task of pushing a boulder to the top of a mountain, only for it to roll back down.

West focuses on the Korengal and Wai-gal valleys, where soldiers and Marines operated in isolated outposts, surrounded by volatile villages with conflicting languages, loyalties and expectations. In these valleys, the United States suffered some of her highest single-day casualties.

The plan for these outposts, which was to disrupt the Taliban's movement between Afghanistan and Pakistan, ultimately failed and turned into a nightmare for American units operating with minimal popular sup-

port from the villages and with too few soldiers and Marines.

Corruption within the Afghan government has further impeded progress. West recounts tales of U.S. forces who carried out their missions precisely, leading to the capture of important Taliban leaders and bomb-makers, only for those men to be released within weeks or even days due to mishandling and corruption within the Afghan justice system. The author also argues that in many villages, the cash handouts for reconstruction have created a culture of entitlement.

In the infamous Helmand province in southern Afghanistan, West details the actions of British and American forces fighting together, as well as those of Task Force Commando, a specialized unit combining U.S. Special Forces advisors and soldiers of the Afghan army. Through an examination of Task Force Commando's battle for the hostile town of Marjah, West finds that this type of unit was quite successful and required fewer American troops, making it easier and cheaper to maintain. Through this example, the author provides evidence indicating how the United States could eliminate the Taliban as well as lower the cost of the war in both American lives and money.

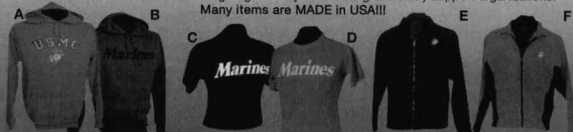
West's conclusion regarding the need for units similar to Task Force Commando as a method of improving the strategy, however, comes with a historical warning. While the training of an effective Afghan army is imperative, the United States must focus on training that army to remain effective even without the help of American firepower. U.S. advisors in Vietnam helped to create a South Vietnamese army in America's own image, and despite its effectiveness with American support, the South Vietnamese faltered without the help of American air support and firepower after the U.S. left Vietnam.

Ultimately, Bing West's "The Wrong War" provides tales of both bravery and tragedy while simultaneously offering

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convincing evidence of the multitude of problems plaguing U.S. forces in Afghanistan. This book presents valuable lessons for those interested in the war in Afghanistan as well as for those interested in the infantryman's perspective of counterinsurgency on the ground.

Colin M. Colbourn

*Editor's note: Colin M. Colbourn was an intern at History Division, Marine Corps University and currently is pursuing his doctorate in history at the University of Southern Mississippi, where he studies the U.S. Marine Corps and military culture at USM's Center for the Study of War and Society.*

**EQUIPPING THE CORPS, 1892-1937: Volume 1: Web Gear, Weapons and Headgear.** By Alec S. Tulko. Published by R. James Bender Publishing. 384 pages. Stock #1932970150. \$71.96 MCA Members. \$79.95 Regular Price.

Noted historian Alec Tulko has released another in a series of books covering the material history of the United States Marine Corps. His first work, "Grunt Gear," covering the USMC combat infantry uniforms and equipment of World War II, set a milestone in research and documentation of Marine Corps equipment. His latest book, "Equipping the Corps, 1892-1937: Volume 1," takes an in-depth look at the web gear, weapons and headgear of the U.S. Marines from the Empire years of the Spanish-American War era to the decade before WW II.

In researching this new book, the author quickly realized that prior to WW II, the line between combat uniforms and service and dress uniforms became blurred. At the beginning of the 20th century, still following more than 100 years of traditions, the predecessors of today's blue dress uniform not only saw service in garrison, but were field/combat uniforms as well. Rapidly evolving weapons technology and the effects these new weapons had on tactical doctrine and warfighting would have a dramatic impact on Marine Corps clothing and equipment.

From 1892 to 1937, the Marine Corps uniform regulations saw a rapid and continuous change in not only uniforms and equipment but their applications as well. To look at the "combat uniforms and equipment" of this era, Tulko ultimately would have to touch on all levels of Marine Corps uniforms. To properly cover these changes, the author has divided his research into two volumes.

This first volume covers Marine Corps web (field) equipment, weapons and headgear from 1892 to 1937. Combining the use of detailed modern photographs of surviving uniforms and equipment items,

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